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Decolonisation of South African Higher Education and Curriculum Development: Challenges, Progress, and Prospects

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Abstract: This article reflects on the evolving challenges confronting higher education in South Africa in the aftermath of sustained student activism demanding radical institutional transformation. Central to these struggles are calls for the decolonisation and transformation of the university curriculum, which gained national prominence during the 2015 #FeesMustFall protests. These protests exposed persistent concerns around the affordability of higher education, structural inequality, and the endurance of colonial legacies within historically white universities. In 2016, the #RhodesMustFall movement further intensified demands for institutional change by directly challenging colonial symbols, epistemologies, and entrenched power relations within higher education. Collectively, these movements catalysed widespread calls for comprehensive curriculum reform. Students and scholars advocated for socially responsive curricula, the dismantling of Eurocentric knowledge systems, the meaningful incorporation of African epistemologies and worldviews, and the reorientation of universities towards South Africa's socio-economic and political realities. Consequently, these protests reignited critical debates on the purpose and role of universities in a post-apartheid and post-colonial context, particularly in relation to access, knowledge production, identity, and power. The article adopts a qualitative research approach, drawing on primary and secondary sources, including academic literature, government gazettes, policy documents, and institutional texts. Through document analysis, the study examines how decolonisation is conceptualised, articulated, and implemented within South African higher education. Its primary objective is to assess the extent to which decolonisation policies and practices have been realised across universities. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how students and scholars understand decolonisation, evaluate curriculum and instructional changes introduced in response to decolonial demands, and identify institutional factors that enable or constrain effective implementation. The analysis is theoretically grounded in Frantz Fanon's approach to decolonisation, which offers a critical framework for understanding the psychological, cultural, and structural dimensions of colonial domination and liberation. Fanon's work provides an important lens for analysing curriculum transformation and institutional change as both political and epistemic projects within South African higher education.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Transformation and Curriculum Development, Research and Innovation, Teaching and Learning.

Introduction

The goal of the decolonisation movement is to fundamentally challenge Eurocentric dominance in order to enhance inclusivity and broaden the diversity of academic and cultural environments within universities. Decolonisation aims to transform the curriculum, institutional culture, and knowledge systems so that they

more accurately reflect African experiences, histories, and worldviews. However, despite its radical intentions, the movement faces several obstacles that limit its effectiveness within South African higher education institutions. These challenges include the risk of essentialising African knowledge, which may unintentionally reproduce narrow or exclusionary perspectives if not approached critically. In addition, institutional inertia shaped by long-standing bureaucratic structures and resistance to change continues to hinder meaningful transformation. The persistence of global academic norms, which often prioritise Western epistemologies, further complicates attempts to embed locally relevant knowledge. Deep-rooted inequalities inherited from the apartheid era also continue to shape access, participation, and outcomes in higher education, making transformation uneven. The overly bureaucratic nature of many universities slows the pace of reform and can frustrate both staff and students seeking decolonisation. The student-led movements of 2015 and 2016 marked a significant turning point, as they brought renewed urgency to debates about Eurocentrism and institutional transformation. While earlier scholars such as Mamdani and Makgoba had long criticised Eurocentric curricula, the recent movements intensified calls for comprehensive and inclusive curriculum reform.

Background

The decolonisation movement in South African higher education emerged as a direct outcome of the student activism that intensified in 2015 and resulted in nationwide mass protest action. What began as a call for financial justice under the #FeesMustFall campaign soon expanded into a broader challenge against the structural and epistemic inequalities embedded in universities (Heleta, 2016). Students further mobilised under the #RhodesMustFall movement, which questioned the continued presence of colonial symbols and their influence on institutional culture. These demonstrations demanded radical curriculum reform that would challenge Eurocentric knowledge systems and promote the inclusion of African perspectives in teaching and research. Central to these calls was the argument that universities needed to reflect African values, histories, and lived experiences in both their academic content and governance structures.

Students also highlighted the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems, arguing that their recognition was essential for genuine transformation (Le Grange, 2016). The protests drew attention to socio-economic inequalities that continued to restrict access to higher education for many black South Africans. In addition, the movement exposed the slow pace of institutional transformation more than two decades after the end of apartheid. The decolonisation agenda therefore became one of the primary outcomes of the student-led protests, fundamentally reshaping national debates on higher education reform. As a result, decolonisation gained prominence not only as an academic concern but also as a political and social imperative. The momentum generated in 2015 and 2016 firmly positioned decolonisation at the centre of transformation discourse within South African universities. Ultimately, the student movements served as a catalyst for re-examining the purpose, identity, and future direction of higher education in a democratic South Africa (Heleta, 2016; Le Grange, 2016).

The goal of the decolonisation movement is to fundamentally challenge Eurocentric dominance in order to enhance inclusivity and broaden the diversity of academic and cultural environments within universities. Although decolonisation seeks radical transformation, the movement has encountered several obstacles and limitations within South African institutions. These challenges arise from concerns about the essentialisation of African knowledge, institutional inertia, and the tension between global academic norms and local relevance (Mamdani, 1998; Makgoba, 1997).

Furthermore, the post-apartheid system of inequality remains deeply entrenched in South African higher education, and overly bureaucratic university structures continue to hinder meaningful change and development. This introduction therefore provides a framework for a critical examination of both the benefits and limitations of decolonisation in creating a more representative and equitable higher education system in South Africa. The events of 2015 and 2016 marked a significant turning point, as the student-led movements such as *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* catalysed the contemporary decolonisation agenda. For the first time, the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems was publicly and forcefully challenged by students. However, earlier scholars, including Mamdani and Makgoba, had already critiqued the persistence of Eurocentrism in South African higher education and highlighted the need for thorough curriculum reform (Mamdani, 1998; Makgoba, 1997).

Decolonisation movements have long been challenged by the persistent influence of Eurocentrism within South African higher education. A notable example is the experience of Makgoba, who became the first indigenous African Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Transformation at the University of the Witwatersrand. During his tenure, Makgoba proposed several transformative initiatives aimed at reshaping the institution to reflect African perspectives. These included the development of new curricula that foreground African epistemologies, the recognition and integration of

indigenous knowledge systems, and the repositioning of the university community to embrace Pan-African values (Makgoba, 1997). However, these efforts were met with significant resistance from those who sought to preserve Eurocentric academic traditions. This opposition ultimately contributed to Makgoba's resignation, illustrating the structural and ideological barriers that hinder decolonisation processes in historically white institutions.

In light of these challenges, the present study seeks to investigate the prospects and opportunities of the decolonisation movement in South African higher education, with particular emphasis on curriculum development. It is well documented that the events of 2015 and 2016 brought about a dramatic shift in institutional attitudes towards decolonisation, largely due to the nationwide student protests that demanded transformation. Consequently, several universities began adopting Pan-African approaches and formally integrating decolonial principles into their policies to respond to student demands.

This study will therefore explore key milestones in the decolonisation movement by examining how both scholars and students conceptualise decolonisation. It will also assess institutional reforms and curriculum modifications implemented after the 2015–2016 protests. Lastly, the study will identify institutional enablers and obstacles that continue to shape the implementation and sustainability of decolonisation efforts in South African higher education.

Theoretical Framework: Decolonisation

The decolonization theory of Frank Fanon in Africa informs and directs the research. But since it won't be restricted to Fanon, it also includes more modern decolonization experts such as Mbembe, Mamdani, Makgoba, Crowford, Jansen, and Ndlovu-Gatsheni. Once more, decolonialism theory opposes Eurocentric dominance in African universities and promotes innovative educational approaches that represent the majority, particularly the underprivileged segments of society.

The theoretical framework for examining decolonisation in South African higher education is grounded in postcolonial theory and critical pedagogy. Postcolonial theory, particularly as articulated by scholars like Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, interrogates the lasting impacts of colonial domination on epistemology, identity, and institutional structures. In the South African context, this framework is instrumental in understanding how colonial legacies continue to shape curricula, language policies, and academic hierarchies within universities (Heleta, 2016).

Critical pedagogy, as developed by Paulo Freire (1970), complements postcolonial theory by emphasizing the role of education in either reproducing or challenging systems of oppression. It calls for a participatory, student-centered approach to knowledge production that validates indigenous and marginalised epistemologies. Within South African universities, this theoretical lens underscores the need to dismantle Eurocentric curricula and pedagogical practices that alienate the majority of the student population (Le Grange, 2016).

The intersection of these theories supports a broader understanding of decolonisation as not merely symbolic or representational, but as an epistemic shift. This shift requires rethinking what is taught, how it is taught, and who is authorized to teach. The 2015–2016 #FeesMustFall and Rhodes Must Fall movements intensified demands for such a transformation, foregrounding the urgency of epistemic justice and institutional reform. Hence, the theoretical framework situates decolonisation as a multidimensional process intellectual, cultural, and structural necessary for the democratisation and Africanisation of higher education.

Research methodology, research objectives and significant of the study

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach that enables an in-depth exploration of meanings, experiences, and contextual nuances surrounding decolonisation in South African higher education. The research draws on textual and documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources, including published academic articles, government gazettes, institutional reports, and other official documents. As the study does not involve direct interviews or human participants, its analytical focus remains on interpreting existing materials. The interpretive stance is grounded in postcolonial and critical pedagogy theories, particularly the works of Fanon (1963) and Freire (1970), which provide a critical lens for examining power, knowledge, and structural inequality. The methodology is both iterative and reflexive, allowing the researcher to move fluidly between theory and data to construct a coherent and contextually informed understanding of the decolonisation process.

This approach aligns with the PRISMA framework, which enhances transparency, systematic reporting, and credibility in qualitative evidence synthesis (Page et al., 2021). The study's use of thematic analysis to identify structural, curricular, and epistemic challenges is consistent with interpretivist traditions that privilege meaning making over measurement, enabling a detailed examination of how decolonisation is conceptualised, contested, and implemented within higher education institutions.

Literature Review: Analytical Dimensions of Decolonization in South African Higher Education

a. Structural Challenges

Institutional inertia and resistance to change in South African Higher Education is one of a main challenges or structural obstacle. These obstacles affect a re-designing of the curriculum and implementation of the decolonisation concept in South African Higher education. At the same time South African Higher Education system is structured based on colonialism and Eurocentric which promote white minority culture and oppressed the majority (Makgoba, 2020; and Mamdani 2020). This led to epistemological aggression within the higher institution of learning since Eurocentric is well rooted and developed in South Africa Higher Education structures. Then, university structures and other forums are using power struggle within the two ideologies. Hence implementation of decolonization concept faces challenges because Eurocentric had a hegemonic power and well structures in higher education. Again, there is unequal balance in some South African higher education institutions especially where the majority are not well represented, hence there is little or less transformation. For example, in South Africa Higher Education decision are taken by university senate and council which is based on power dominance through representation. Therefore, in institution where African academics are underrepresented or are minority there is a lack of representation in highest decision-making body. Hence, it became difficult to implement a decolonization in some South African Universities.

The main difficulty in this aspect is the endurance of what Jansen (2017) refers to as the "corporate-managerial" university. The neoliberal mindset, emphasizing efficiency, measurements, and market importance, can readily incorporate the rhetoric of decolonization while maintaining its core power dynamics. Decolonization can be simplified to a "strategic objective" within an institutional framework, devoid of its revolutionary political essence. According to Badat (2010), the demands of financial viability frequently overshadow obligations to social justice, resulting in a performative instead of a transformative approach to decolonization. Additionally, entrenched institutional cultures, which Nyamnjoh (2012) metaphorically refers to as "concrete slabs," are resistant to transformation, frequently maintaining colonial mindsets and bureaucracies despite the presence of progressive policies.

The persistent inequality in access, funding, and infrastructure in South African Higher Education contributed of having a little progress on decolonialisation of curriculum. This is emanating from the legacy of colonialism and apartheid which divide South African Higher Education in terms of accessibility, funding, infrastructure. Hence former Bantustan Universities or institutions are still struggling to raise enough funding to implement the decolonisation of curriculum. Again, former Bantustan institutions had less developed in terms of infrastructure because there were getting less funding, as a result there is less funding for a decolonisation projects. Institutions that primarily serve Black student populations frequently suffer from chronic underfunding, crowded lectures, and insufficient library and research facilities.

In this realm of "crisis management," the challenging effort needed to reform syllabi, formulate innovative teaching methods, and produce decolonial educational resources turns into a privilege. The scholarly emphasis is inevitably shifted from fundamental, critical changes in the curriculum to the more pressing issue of guaranteeing students' physical access to classrooms, textbooks, and academic assistance, thus sustaining a system where the discussion regarding what is taught becomes a privilege overshadowed by the fight over who receives education and under which circumstances. Conversely, underfunded universities frequently find themselves reliant on the established, Eurocentric academic framework, encompassing foreign textbooks and global collaborations that might overlook local knowledge development. This establishes a twisted situation where the institutions that best represent the Black majority, for whom decolonization is most critical, are the least prepared to carry it out effectively.

Globalisation pressure reinforcing Euro-centric academic dominance is a major threat on re-designing and decolonisation of South African Higher Education. However Eurocentric supremacy in higher education has resulted of having not easily to transform a higher education in South Africa. For instance, in those unreformed or Eurocentric institutions there are little or less understanding about decolonisation model or concept. The main cause of that majority of their faculties especial on teaching and learning have no clear understanding of the decolonisation and it impact in South African higher education. It because there is “the longstanding patterns of power that emerged from colonialism and continue to define culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge production, long after the end of direct colonialism. It is that continuing” (Crawford el at, 2021: p. 30). Hence there is a growing fear that Eurocentric perspective or outlook on curriculum might be replace by decolonisation curriculum. At the same Eurocentric perspective might ended up in fear of losing its supremacy and influence and even its relevance in South African Higher Education.

The unyielding forces of globalization present a notable and frequently contradictory challenge to the decolonization of higher education in South Africa by systematically entrenching Euro-American academic supremacy. This establishes a strong institutional motivation for South African universities to favour international significance instead of local epistemic requirements. As a result, scholars are urged to position their studies within recognized Western theoretical models and to write on subjects that captivate a worldwide, instead of a Southern African, readership. This worldwide academic uniformity actively suppresses the effective reworking of curricula and teaching methods. The desire for "world-class" recognition, typically measured by imitating Anglo-American frameworks, hinders the bold innovation needed for a decolonial education. Curricula need to be identifiable and "transferable" to meet the demands of international accrediting organizations and draw in international students, which restricts the capacity to position African thought systems as foundational instead of merely as exotic additions.

b. Curriculum Development Challenges

Curricula remain heavily dominated by Eurocentric context and ideology it became difficult for the student to easily adopt under a Eurocentric Curriculum. This has resulted an underrepresentation in South African Higher Education also excludes students from previously disadvantage background due to a Eurocentric model. As a result of having higher education with no replication and absent of their values towards previously disadvantage students. Then, there is no ambition on those students to have effort on studies, and it led to a poor performance and results. Then, there is a high demand for the reform in most South African institution of higher education. This has been seen during the *#Fees Must Fall* campaign in South African Higher Education institutions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Mbembe, 2016; and Jansen, 2019; and Crowford, 2021). It where students demand a drastically change and transformation in most former white institutions and that lead to a rebirth of the decolonization of higher education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Mbembe, 2016; and Jansen, 2019; and Crowford, 2021). The 2015 #FeesMustFall which was led by student movement" (Lange, 2025:1). A Eurocentric curriculum creates a significant and often alienating cognitive dissonance for many students in South Africa. The process of learning turns into imitation instead of critical involvement, as achievement relies on the capacity to replicate Western ways of thinking. This renders learning extremely challenging, not due to a deficiency in student capability, but because the curriculum requires a kind of intellectual self-negation.

Lack of integration of indigenous knowledge system (IKS) into mainstream disciplines is one of the major challenges of implementing decolonisation of curriculum. This has been a main problem which prevents transformation and decolonization in South African Higher Education. At the same time the existence or present of a Eurocentric curriculum makes majority of academics being stuck in the past. Again, the university leadership has little less knowledge of decolonization model especial on faculties (Mamdani, 2020). This resulting of having a continuation of the Eurocentric knowledge and curriculum in most universities in South Africa (Crawford et al 2021). This continuation is supported through ignoring of African Indigenous knowledge and promoting of the Eurocentric outlooks. Hence there is a continuation of underrepresenting African outlook because there is less about African content, history, knowledge, ideology in the current curriculum system (Mbembe, 2016; Mamdani, 2020; Makgoba, 2020; Jansen, 2023, Jansen, 2025). Then, this continuation does not reflection towards majority of students in South African Higher Education. It also forms Eurocentric supremacy biases through marginalisation of African perspective intellect.

Limited capacity, complexity and diversity among academics to design decolonial pedagogies is one of a major challenge. The main problem which prevents transformation and decolonization in South African Higher Education is Eurocentric curriculum which makes majority of academics being stuck in the past. Again, in university leadership there is little less knowledge of decolonization model especial on faculties (Mamdani, 2020). This resulting of having a continuation of the Eurocentric knowledge and curriculum in most universities in South Africa (Crawford et al 2021). This continuation is supported through ignoring of African outlook and knowledge and promoting of the Eurocentric outlooks. Hence there is a continuation of underrepresenting African outlook because there is less about African content, history, knowledge, ideology in the current curriculum system (Mbembe, 2016; Mamdani,2020; Makgoba, 2020; Jansen, 2023; Jansen, 2025). Then, this continuation does not reflection towards majority of students in South African Higher Education. It also forms Eurocentric supremacy biases through marginalisation of African perspective intellect.

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c. Progress for Achievement

Policy frameworks that acknowledge transformation and curriculum reform in South African higher education include the White Paper on Higher Education and Training (1997**)**, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013), and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030**.** These frameworks were designed to enhance transformation by addressing historical inequalities, promoting inclusive knowledge systems, and eliminating persistent disparities within institutions of higher learning (Department of Education, 1997; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013; National Planning Commission, 2012). The NDP, in particular, places strong emphasis on curriculum reform, the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, and the promotion of social justice and sustainable development within higher education (National Planning Commission, 2012). Collectively, these policy directives represent important progress towards transforming and decolonising curriculum development in South Africa.

One of the most visible and impactful developments has been the rise of increased student and staff activism**,** which has brought institutional debates on decolonisation into sharper focus. Movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall played a decisive role in shifting decolonisation from a specialised academic topic to a national imperative (Heleta, 2016; Langa et al., 2017). Prior to these movements, the idea of decolonising higher education was largely confined to academic seminars, conferences, and scholarly publications. The activism of 2015 and 2016 disrupted this limited engagement by transforming theoretical critiques into urgent and concrete demands for structural and curricular change (Le Grange, 2016).

Through the occupation of administrative buildings, the coordination of national shutdowns, and the strategic use of social media, student activists foregrounded issues such as epistemic violence, financial exclusion, and the persistence of colonial iconography on university campuses (Naicker, 2016). These actions forced institutional leaders to move beyond rhetorical commitments and establish task teams, curriculum review committees, and official commissions aimed at responding to students' demands (Heleta, 2016). As a result, activism penetrated the institutional core, making decolonisation an unavoidable governance and policy priority.

However, this success also introduced a new and complex phase of conflict within universities. As decolonisation gained prominence, it increasingly encountered entrenched bureaucratic and political structures that slowed or diluted its implementation. This has given rise to ongoing debates about the pace, nature, and authenticity of institutional responses (Le Grange, 2016). Consequently, tensions have emerged between activists and administrators regarding what constitutes meaningful transformation as opposed to symbolic or superficial compliance. These internal debates continue to shape the trajectory of decolonisation within South African higher education.

Pilot projects introducing African-centred curricula and research methodologies.

There is therefore a clear need for South African higher education institutions to undertake a critical introspection of the continued reliance on Eurocentric perspectives as dominant teaching pedagogies. This introspection is necessary because "Western notions of academic knowledge production bring with them particular discursive scientific practices and interpretive frameworks, and it is difficult to think outside of these frames due to their hegemonic status" (Crawford, 2021, p. 34). Through such reflection, institutions should identify meaningful ways of reforming pedagogical approaches to ensure that they are more inclusive and contextually relevant. In addition, universities should establish centres dedicated to African knowledge systems and intellectual traditions, which would promote broader participation and enhance epistemic diversity within the university community (Mbembe, 2016). Such initiatives would also address long-standing concerns regarding equity and strengthen social justice in higher education, especially within the framework of the post-apartheid democratic dispensation (Makgoba, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Crawford, 2021). For example, the University of South Africa (UNISA) established the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute, which advances the principles of the African Renaissance. As a result, the institution has foregrounded leadership philosophies grounded in African identity, norms, and values. This centre has therefore become an important space for both student and staff activism in support of African-centred curricula and research, providing a genuine reflection of African identity within higher education.

d. Prospects and Future Pathways

Building Capacity for Decolonial Scholarship and Pan-African Institutional Leadership

Building capacity for decolonial scholarship among academics requires the establishment of dedicated centres for decolonisation within universities, ideally hosted by Pan-African institutions. For example, the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute at UNISA could lead the decolonisation agenda by conducting capacity-building programmes for academics and students across all faculties. Such initiatives would guide the decolonisation movement in a coherent direction and minimise differences in approaches to curriculum transformation and institutional reform (Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). By coordinating efforts across multiple universities, including the University of Zululand**,** University of KwaZulu-Natal, University of Cape Town, and Wits University, a clear and unified strategy for curriculum decolonisation and the broader higher education community could be established. This would ensure that decolonisation efforts are systematic, sustainable, and institutionally embedded.

Strengthening University Community Partnerships

Strengthening partnerships between universities and local communities is essential for promoting socially responsive research and enhancing community engagement. Deputy Vice-Chancellors responsible for community engagement should take the lead in building strong, collaborative relationships between universities and surrounding communities. This can be formalised through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with local stakeholders, enabling research projects that reflect local contexts and priorities (Heleta, 2016). Such partnerships would provide postgraduate students and researchers with opportunities that have traditionally been underutilised, enhancing professional development and generating socio-economic benefits for both universities and communities. A structured collaboration would create a sustainable framework for knowledge co-production, fostering mutual prosperity and a responsive higher education system.

Establishing Epistemic Plurality in Curriculum Development

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning should ensure that curricula strike a careful balance between global and local knowledge traditions. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and African epistemologies must be incorporated into academic programmes, ensuring that the content reflects African perspectives (Le Grange, 2016; Crawford, 2021). At the same time, curricula should retain exposure to global knowledge systems, ensuring that graduates remain competitive and well-versed in international scholarship. Achieving epistemic plurality safeguards the relevance of decolonisation while maintaining global academic standards, thus integrating African perspectives without isolating students from global intellectual discourse.

Framework for Analysis and Application: Reforming Governance Structures, Recruitment, and Funding Models

The decolonisation of South African higher education remains fundamentally incomplete without the radical reform of governance structures, recruitment policies, and funding models, as these elements form the operational architecture that sustains institutional culture and decision-making (Heleta, 2016; Le Grange, 2016). Effective decolonial reform requires the democratisation of university councils and senates, ensuring that individuals and groups most affected by epistemic marginalisation and social exclusion are empowered with a direct voice in shaping institutional priorities and policies. This involves reviewing appointment and recruitment practices to promote equitable representation among academic and administrative staff, thereby fostering diversity and inclusivity at all levels of decision-making. Similarly, funding models must be reconsidered to address historical inequalities and to provide sufficient support for students and programmes that advance African knowledge systems, indigenous research, and curriculum innovation (Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). By aligning governance, staffing, and resource allocation with decolonial principles, higher education institutions can create environments that are both socially just and academically vibrant, reinforcing the transformative objectives of the decolonisation agenda.

Conclusion

The decolonisation movement in South African higher education represents a significant turning point in the struggle to transform institutions that have long been shaped by colonial and apartheid legacies. Sparked by the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements, students and scholars brought national attention to the enduring dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems, structural inequalities, and exclusionary practices embedded within universities. While policy frameworks, activism, and pilot projects have contributed to meaningful progress, institutional inertia, resource disparities, and deep-rooted epistemic hierarchies continue to constrain the full realisation of decolonial goals. The analysis shows that decolonisation is not a symbolic gesture but an epistemic, structural, and political project that requires a fundamental reimagining of curricula, governance, and knowledge production. Ultimately, successful decolonisation demands sustained commitment from academic leaders, lectures,

students, and communities to create a higher education system that reflects African identities, values, and intellectual traditions while remaining engaged with global scholarship.

Recommendations

Establish dedicated decolonial centres within universities**.** Institutions should create specialised centres that develop, coordinate, and monitor decolonial scholarship across faculties. These centres should lead capacity-building programmes for academics and ensure coherence in curriculum reform initiatives. Strengthen Pan-African and inter-university collaboration. Partnerships between institutions such as UNISA, the University of Zululand, UKZN, UCT, and Wits University should be formalised to support shared strategies, resources, and standards for decolonial curriculum development. Institutionalise community university partnerships. Community engagement should be integrated into teaching, research, and curriculum design through MOUs and collaborative projects, ensuring that knowledge production reflects local needs, cultures, and priorities. Promote epistemic plurality in curricula. Universities must balance African epistemologies with global knowledge traditions to ensure contextual relevance without compromising international competitiveness. Indigenous Knowledge Systems should be embedded meaningfully rather than added superficially. Address structural and resource inequalities. Government and university management should allocate targeted funding to historically marginalised institutions to support infrastructure development, curriculum reform, and academic capacity-building. Develop comprehensive academic staff training. Academics require ongoing professional development to equip them with the theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological skills necessary for implementing decolonial approaches within teaching and research. Implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Universities should establish transparent frameworks for tracking progress in curriculum transformation, representation, governance reform, and student participation. Foster student participation in curriculum redesign. Students must be included as co-creators of knowledge to ensure that curricula reflect diverse worldviews and lived realities across the higher education sector.

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